

Continuing a father's  
fine rug company  
intertwines two  
generations of the  
Moattar family.

# Woven Together

by ED WESTCHLER

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Marcialyn Moattar (seated) shares her passion and vision for the family business with her children Andrea and Jason.

“I never thought I’d work for the family business,” says Andrea Moattar of Atlanta-based Moattar Ltd., the largest source of antique and reproduction Persian rugs in the Southeast.

“In college I majored in art history, and I wanted to move west and work in an art gallery. But my parents convinced me that Moattar was the best art gallery for me.” Today she is president of the firm her parents founded.

“I didn’t expect to join the business, either,” says Jason Moattar. Things changed about nine years ago. “When I was 25 and living in Washington, DC, I didn’t want to leave. But our father was fighting non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and one day my mother called and told me to come home. Andrea, who was already working here, called, too, and said, ‘We need you. Now.’”

Jason says that, while circumstances forced his move to rejoin the business, he is grateful they did. “I have the blessing of working with my family. Besides,” he adds with a grin, “nobody can fire me.” Jason’s title, like Andrea’s, is president.

Over the past nine years, Moattar Ltd. has expanded its lines and concentrated its business in a single location as a trade-only operation (meaning it now sells exclusively to interior designers and other such professionals). The company has also sold rugs to a few places you may have heard of, such as the White House. Things have gone well since Jason and Andrea came back to Atlanta.

### **An Immigrant’s Initiative**

Moattar Ltd. occupies an 8,000-square-foot showroom in the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center. Walk in, and you’re dazzled by fine Oushak, Tabriz and Serapi antiques; uncanny reproductions of rugs with Egyptian, Samarkand and

Peshawar patterns; and elegant contemporary textiles. Near the front of the gallery, you pass a table with a photograph of a handsome, silver-haired man in a well-tailored suit. That’s Edward Moattar, the late patriarch.

“Eddie came from a family of 13 children in Persia, and he was the first of them to move to the United States, in the early 1960s — years before the revolution. He believed in the American dream,” says Marcialyn, Edward’s widow.

Marcialyn was raised in Augusta, GA, a world away from the Middle East. “We met the year Eddie arrived in this country, when I was 23 and he was 36,” she recalls. “He asked me to marry him after we’d dated three months, and he gave me just five minutes to make up my mind. I told myself, ‘I can’t let this wonderful man go.’ We got married one month later.”

Easy street, it wasn’t. They lived in an apartment furnished with a sagging sofa, and Edward launched ventures that were hit (real estate) and miss (a chocolate factory). Then, Andrea explains, his brother Isaac sent him some rugs from Iran, saying, “See what you can do.”

“We couldn’t afford a truck, so Eddie would load rugs into our car for delivery,” says Marcialyn. “He sold rugs to other dealers, and eventually we opened our own showroom.” Both of them developed into connoisseurs of fine rugs, but their character was as critical to their success as their expertise.

“My mother is such a likable person to have out on the floor selling — a sweet, Southern lady,” says Andrea.

Her late father was well-liked, too. “He had a big personality, a great sense of humor, and so many wonderful stories — I wish I’d recorded him,” recalls Andrea. “People still come into the showroom and tell us, ‘Your dad used to teach us about rugs.’”

“Sure, there’s the potential for heated exchanges when family members work together,” says Jason Moattar. “But Dad taught us that there’s nobody you can trust more than family.”



He taught her, as well: "I absorbed a lot of knowledge, just growing up here."

Jason says the critical asset he gained from the founders is integrity. "Our parents never played games with price or quality," Jason notes.

### Training and Trust

Edward was diagnosed with cancer in the mid-1990s; coincidentally, so was the company's bookkeeper. "I was only in my twenties, but suddenly, everything was on my shoulders," recalls Andrea. The company needed not only a family leader, but also key financial help. "That's why we called Jason."

Reluctantly, Jason returned home. "Trying to find my niche was a struggle," he admits. "Believe me, it was not all smiley faces; Andrea and I had some pretty good fights."

"Dad trained us differently," says Andrea. "He taught my brother how to do inventory, the books and invoicing as well as sales, but he had only taught me sales. That's partly because when I came on, we had someone handling the books, and partly because I was a girl," she explains in a way that implies acceptance of her father, old-fashioned attitudes and all.

It took several years for the siblings to learn "not to step on each other's toes," as Jason puts it. "Eventually we picked up on each other's strengths and weaknesses, and kind of organically divided up our responsibilities."

When sizing up antique rugs, Andrea solicits Marcialyn's opinion, too. "Mom is also more hands-on with the books," she says. "She's the one who works closest with our Senior Trust Advisor and Portfolio Manager from Wachovia."

What's the biggest perk of working with family? "Trust," declares Jason. "Sure, there's the potential for heated exchanges when family members work together. But Dad taught us that there's nobody you can trust more than family. The three of us have the same goals."

"And," adds Andrea, "we all have our last name on the line." R

*Writer and editor Ed Wetschler contributes to The New York Times and co-produced special issues of Smart Money customized for physicians.*

*Photographer Kelli Baxendale's clients include Georgia Pacific and the American Cancer Society. A frequent contributor to Renaissance, she divides her time between Atlanta and Jackson Hole, WY.*

As co-presidents, Andrea Moattar (near side of rugs) and Jason Moattar (far side of rugs, blurred) share the work of operations in the business.

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